Beatles Interviews Database: John Lennon & Paul McCartney: Melody Maker, November & December 1971

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ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW:

In November 1971, Paul McCartney sat down with Chris Charlesworth for an exclusive interview that would appear in the November 20th issue of Melody Maker magazine.

During the course of the conversation, he shared his thoughts on John and Yoko, the dissolution of the Beatles' business partnership, and his feelings on John's song 'How Do You Sleep.' Charlesworth noted about the interview: "Paul is being very honest and straightforward -– probably too honest. 'Don't print this but...' is the preamble to many of his remarks."

Reading the article infuriated John Lennon so much that Lennon dashed a letter of reply to Melody Maker, and requested that his letter be published in its entirety in an effort to give 'equal time' to his version of the story. Melody Maker published Lennon's full letter in the December 4th 1971 issue of their weekly magazine.

The exchange read as a very public argument between the two ex-Beatles. McCartney's interview and John's letter are both presented below.

McCartney's album 'Wild Life' would be released on December 7th 1971, while Lennon's 'Imagine' album had just been released on October 8th.

Paul's interview begins with him discussing his view of the current state of the Beatles' legal affairs.

- Jay Spangler,
www.beatlesinterviews.org

PAUL: "I just want the four of us to get together somewhere and sign a piece of paper saying it's all over and we want to divide the money four ways. No one else would be there, not even Linda or Yoko or Allen Klein. We'd just sign the paper and hand it to the business people and let them sort it out. That's all I want now, but John won't do it. Everybody thinks I am the agressor but I'm not, you know. I just want out."

"The Beatles never actually copped for all this money, everyone else did. I wouldn't care but you think we could have a new deal

now. You'd think they'd release us. They've made a lot of money and we could shake hands and part company but now we can't. I'm being sued for a million pounds in New York by Northern Songs. It's so complicated."

"There was a bit of hype on the back of the (Let It Be) sleeve for the first time ever on a Beatles album. At the time, the Beatles were very strained with each other and it wasn't a happy time. It said it was a 'new-phase Beatles album' and there was nothing further from the truth. That was the last Beatles album and everybody knew it... (Allen) Klein had it re-produced because he said it didn't sound commercial enough."

"John's whole image now is very honest and open. He's alright, is John. I like his 'Imagine' album but I didn't like the others. 'Imagine' is what John is really like but there was too much political stuff on the other albums. You know, I only really listen to them to see if there's something I can pinch." (laughs)

"'How Do You Sleep'? I think it's silly. So what if I live with straights? I like straights. I have straight babies. It doesn't affect him. He says the only thing I did was 'Yesterday.' He knows that's wrong. (Paul motions to the studio below) I used to sit down there and play, and John would watch me from up here, and he'd really dig some of the stuff I played to him. He can't say all I did was 'Yesterday' because he knows and I know it's not true."

"You know I was asked to play George's concert in New York for Bangla Desh and I didn't. Well, listen. Klein called a press conference and told everyone I had refused to do it -– it wasn't so. I said to George the reason I couldn't do it was because it would mean that all the world's press would scream that the Beatles had got back together again and I know that would have made Klein very happy. It would have been a historical event and Klein would have taken the credit. I didn't really fancy playing anyway. If it wasn't for Klein I might have had second thoughts about it but I don't know, really. Allen's a good talker. The others really dig him, but I've made the mistake of trying to advise them against him and that pissed them off. I think they might secretly feel that I am right though."

"John wanted to do a big thing in Toronto (9/13/69 concert, Toronto Rock and Roll Revival) but I didn't dig that at all. I hear that before he went on stage he was sick, and that's just what I didn't want. Like anybody else I have been nervous because of the Beatles thing."

"John and Yoko are not cool in what they are doing. I saw them on television the other night and thought that what they are

saying about what they wanted to do together was basically the same as what Linda and I want to do."

"Before John was leaving the Beatles, I was lying in bed at home one night and I thought we could get a band together, like his Plastic Ono Band. I felt the urge because we had never played live for four years. We all wanted to appear on a stage but not with the Beatles. We couldn't do it as the Beatles because it would be so big. We'd have to find a million-seater hall or something."

"I wanted to get in a van and do an unadvertised concert at a Saturday night hop at Slough Town Hall or somewhere like that. We'd call ourselves Rikki and the Red Streaks or something and just get up and play. There'd be no press and we'd tell nobody about it. John thought it was a daft idea."

"My best playing days were at the Cavern lunchtime sessions. We'd go onstage with a cheese roll and a cigarette and we felt we had really something going on. The amps used to fuse and we'd stop and sing a Sunblest Bread commercial while they were repaired. I'd walk off down the street playing my guitar and annoying the neighbors. I couldn't do that now, but it's what I want to do with this new group."

"We just don't know how we are going to do. I don't want to start with a Wings concert at the Albert Hall with the world watching and analyzing. I just want to play a small dance, and rock a bit."

"We will start just by turning up at a place we fancy visiting, and just play a straightforward gig. We might use another name to keep it quiet. We have rehearsed and we can play live together. In fact it sounds quite good. It doesn't really matter that much."

I don't want Wings to become a media group, with our signatures on knickers which are sold for promotion. I don't like that now. I was happy with that situation in the Beatles, but it died in the end. We are starting off as a new band, but if we ever get to be huge like the Beatles it will be very different."

John Lennon's letter of response, published in its entirety in Melody Maker:

Dear Paul, Linda et all the wee McCartney's,

Thanks for your letter.

1. We give YOU money for your bits of Apple.
2. We give you MORE money in the form of royalties which legally belong to Apple (I know we're Apple, but on the other hand we're not.).

Maybe there's an answer there somewhere, but for the millionth time in these past few years I repeat, 'What about the TAX?' It's all very well, playing 'simple honest ole Paul' in Melody Maker but you know damn well we can't just sign a bit of paper.

You say, 'John won't do it.' I will if you indemnify us against the tax man! Anyway, you know that after we have OUR meeting, the fucking lawyers will have to implement whatever we agree on, right?

If they have some form of agreement between THEM before WE meet, it might make it even easier. It's up to you, as we've said many times, we'll meet whenever you like. Just make up your mind! Eg. two weeks ago I asked you on the phone, 'Please let's meet without advisors, etc. and decide what we want,' and I emphasized especially Maclen (Lennon and McCartney's songwriting company) which is mainly our concern, but you refused, right?

You said under NO CONDITION would you sell to us if we didn't do what you wanted, you'd sue us again and that Ringo and George are going to break you John, etc. etc.

Now I was quite straight with you that day, and you tried to shoot me down with your emotional "logic." If YOU'RE not the aggressor (as you claim) who the hell took us to court and shat all over us in public?

As I've said before, Have you ever thought that you might POSSIBLY be wrong about something? Your conceit about us and Klein is incredible. You say you "made the mistake of trying to advise them against Klein and that pissed them off" and we secretly feel that you're right! Good God! You must know WE'RE right about Eastman.

One other little lie in your "It's only Paulie" MM bit: Let It Be was not the first bit of hype on a Beatle album. Remember Tony Barrow? And his wonderful writing on "Please Please Me" etc. etc. The early Beatle Xmas records!

And you gotta admit it was a 'new-phase' Beatle album, incidentally written in the style of the great Barrow himself! By the way, what happened to my idea of putting the parody of our first album cover on the Let It Be cover?

Also, we were intending to parody Barrow originally, so it was hype. But what is your LIFE article? Tony Barrow couldn't have done it better. (And your writing inside of the Wings album [Wild Life] isn't exactly the realist is it?) Anyway, enough of this petty bourgeois fun.

You were right about New York! I do love it; it's the ONLY PLACE TO BE. (Apart from anything else, they leave you alone too!) I see you prefer Scotland! (MM) -- I'll bet you your piece of Apple you'll be living in New York by 1974 (two years is the usual time it takes you -- right?)

Another thing, whadya mean BIG THING in Toronto? It was completely spontaneous. They rang on the Friday, we flew there, and we played on Saturday. I was sick because I was stone pissed. Listen to the album -- with no rehearsal too. Come on

Macka! Own up! We'd never played together before! Half a dozen live shows with no big fuss. In fact we've BEEN DOING what you've said the Beatles should do. Yoko and I have been doing it for three years! (I said it was daft for the Beatles to do it. I still think it's daft.) So go on and do it! Do it! Do it! E.g. Cambridge 1969, completely unadvertised! A very small hall. Lyceum Ballroom, 1969, no fuss, great show -- thirty piece rock band! "Live Jam" out soon! Filmore East, 1971, unannounced. Another good time had by all -- out soon!! We even played in the streets here in the Village (our spiritual home!?) with the great David Peel!! We were moved on by the cops even!! It's best just to DO IT.

I know you'll dig it, and they don't even expect the Beatles now anyway!

So you think 'Imagine' ain't political? It's 'Working Class Hero' with sugar on it for conservatives like yourself!! You obviously didn't dig the words. Imagine! You took 'How Do You Sleep' so literally (read my own review of the album in Crawdaddy.) Your politics are very similar to Mary Whitehouse's -- 'Saying nothing is as loud as saying something.'

Listen, my obsessive old pal, it was George's press conference -- not 'dat ole debbil Klein' -- He said what you said: 'I'd love to come but...' Anyway, we basically did it for the same reasons -- the Beatle bit -- they still called it a Beatle show, with just two of them!

Join the Rock Liberation Front before it gets you.

Wanna put your photo on the label like uncool John and Yoko, do ya? (Aint ya got no shame!) If we're not cool, WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU?

No hard feelings to you either. I know basically we want the same, and as I said on the phone and in this letter, whenever you want to meet, all you have to do is call.

All you need is love
Power to the people
Free all prisoners
Jail the judges
Love and peace
Get it on and rip 'em off

John Lennon

P.S. The bit that really puzzled us was asking to meet WITHOUT

LINDA AND YOKO. I thought you'd have understood BY NOW that I'm JOHNANDYOKO.

P.P.S. Even your own lawyers know you can't "just sign a bit of paper." (or don't they tell you?)

John & Paul's Hindsight Perspective

PAUL circa-1994: "When John did 'How Do You Sleep?' I didn't want to get into a slinging match. Part of it was cowardice. John was a great wit, and I didn't want to go fencing with the rapier champion of East Cheam -- But it meant that I had to take shit -- It meant that I had to take lines like 'All you ever did was Yesterday.' I always find myself wanting to excuse John's behavior, just because I loved him. It's like a child, sure he was a naughty child, but don't you call my child naughty. Even if it's me he's shitting on, don't you call him naughty. That's how I felt about this and still do. I don't have a grudge whatsoever against John. I think he knew exactly what he was doing and because we had been so intimate he knew what would hurt me and used it to great effect. I thought, 'Keep your head down and time will tell,' and it did because in the 'Imagine' film (Imagine John Lennon, documentary) he says it was really all about himself."

JOHN 1974: "It's not about Paul, it's about me. I'm really attacking myself. But I regret the association... well... what's to regret? He lived through it. The only thing that matters is how he and I feel about these things and not what the writer or commentator thinks about it. Him and me are okay."

JOHN 1974: "When I slagged off the Beatles thing, it was like divorce pangs and, me being me, it was 'Blast this! Fuck the past!' I've always had a bit of a mouth and when a thing begins that way you have to live up to it. Then Paul and me had that fight in the pages of MM. It was a period I had to go through. I sort of enjoy the fight at the time -- that's the funny thing. Now we've got it all out and it's cool. I can see the Beatles from a new point of view."

JOHN 1980: "I used my resentment against Paul that I have as a kind of sibling rivalry resentment from youth to create a song... not a terrible vicious horrible vendetta... I used my resentment and withdrawing from Paul and the Beatles, and the relationship with Paul, to write 'How Do You Sleep.' I don't really go 'round with those thoughts in my head all the time."

References:
- Imagine John Lennon (movie, video documentary)
- Lennon December 1980 (BBC radio interview with Andy Peebles)
- Lennon The Definitive Biography, Ray Coleman
- Many Years From Now, Barry Miles
- Melody Maker (original 1971 magazine issues)

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